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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to provide a better understanding of the nature and the operation of the institutions in which exemplary vocational education programs exist. The study employed an interpretive ethnographic design that sought meaning and understanding from within the context of the setting. Twenty-five institutions offering exemplary vocational education programs were identified using an expert panel; they included comprehensive high schools, secondary vocational centers, technical institutes, and community colleges. Fifteen of them were visited for systematic observation and interviews. The study found that a number of general themes were consistent across all the institutions studied. These included the following: (1) a conspicuous focus on quality; (2) participatory leadership; (3) active student organizations; (4) teachers actively involved in curriculum development; (5) high expectations of faculty and students; and (6) adequate funding. (KC)

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INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS UNDERLYING EXCELLENCE IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

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INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS UNDERLYING EXCELLENCE IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

Attention to excellence in vocational education is most frequently focused toward programs, classrooms, and individual student performance. For example, research questions are usually framed to study the composition of course content, methods of instruction and elements of delivery. The broader context in which learning is nested has seldom been researched, and little study has been devoted in the past toward these larger environments in which vocational programs are found - in this case,the institutions themselves.

This research project was based on the premise that the study of institutions in which exemplary vocational education is found might provide insights regarding the nature and importance of this environment. Specifically, a study of exemplary institutions may provide better conceptions of quality instruction and learning environments, a sounder foundation from which to predict and support significant change and improvement, and an avenue of improvement by linking the research in vocational education with other efforts to understand and improve institutional improvement.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The purpose of this study was to provide a better understanding of the nature (characteristics or attributes) and the operation (functioning) of the institutions in which exemplary vocational education programs exist. Research questions guiding this study were:

(a) Are there common essential elements or attributes which characterize vocational education institutions as exemplary and, if so, what are they?

(b) If common elements are found among institutions identified as exemplary, how is the presence of these elements reflected in different educational levels and types of institutions?

(c) What implications do the findings have for program planning and evaluation, for leadership development and support, and for further study?

THEORETICAL/CONCEPTUAL BASE AND RELATED LITERATURE

Popular works in the education reform literature of the 1980's largely ignored vocational and technical education. Authors such as McNett (1984, p.33) and Magisos et al. (1984, p. 3) called it the "unattended issue". Several authors who did address it were less than supportive (Adler, 1982; Sizer, 1984).

Only recently have studies been reported which directly address the role of vocational education as it pertains to educational reform. Two of the

first educational reform reports which dealt with vocational education articulated the need for it in the secondary schools. These were: Education for Tomorrow's Jobs (National Research Council, 1983) and the report of the Panel on Secondary School Education for the Changing Workplace (National Research Council, 1984).

One outcome of the educational reform movement has been the abundance of research associated with effectiveness at the school site level. However, elementary and secondary schools have been the primary targets of these research efforts. An assumption could be made that many of the school effectiveness factors apply to vocational education institutions. Is this assumption true? A study of exemplary vocational education institutions could help verify this assumption, if true, as well as to determine other factors that are uniquely associated with effective vocational education institutions.

A major question emerges from reviewing the literature regarding vocational education, educational excellence, and school effectiveness: Do larger structural variables exist which enable a vocational education institution to accomplish its mission with excellence? Few references in the literature address whether institutional factors may be of importance.

RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Naturalistic procedures were used for this study. The study employed an interpretive ethnographic design that sought meaning and understanding from within the context of the setting. The study was empirical because it assumed that there were neutral grounds for showing which of several explanations was closest to reality in describing why a school is exemplary. It was not positivistic because it did not bestow epistemic privilege on any prejudged set of criteria.

The first procedural step was the formation of a carefully selected national resource group. Membership included individuals knowledgeable about vocational education institutional settings and the study of institutions using naturalistic approaches. The primary functions of this group were to provide general consultation about the project and to assist with the identification and selection of study sites.

Institutions offering exemplary vocational education programs were identified through the use of the resource panel. Panel members identified other knowledgeable individuals in the field who, with the panel, assisted in the selection of sites. Based on the input from the panel and the other knowledgeable individuals, a listing of approximately 25 institutions was identified. Comprehensive high schools, secondary vocational centers, postsecondary technical institutes/colleges, and community colleges were all in this listing. These institutions provided the pool from which sites were chosen for inclusion in the pilot and field studies.

A pilot study was conducted in four comprehensive high schools to develop specific procedures for the research. In this approach, the same team of two to three knowledgeable researchers visited each institutional site to

observe activities and to interview staff members and students. In consideration of the research design utilized for this study, the researchers served as the instruments for collecting data. Anecdotal and contextual data were collected through researcher observations and interviews. No predetermined criteria were used to guide the observations and interviews (factors to look for or specific questions to be asked) because this would have biased the data collection process.

Field studies were conducted in 11 states at two comprehensive high schools, five secondary vocational centers, four postsecondary technical colleges, three community colleges, and one proprietary postsecondary technical institute. During field site visits, systematic observations and interviews were conducted with representative institution staff members and students. Copious field notes were made of the observations and interviews. Audio tape recordings were also made of selected individual and group interviews. These were later transcribed and indexed with the field notes. Joint interpretation and triangulation procedures were used to validate the data collected.

FINDINGS

An analysis of the anecdotal and contextual data collected from the exemplary institutions visited by the research team yielded a number of general themes. These themes were generally consistent across the institutions studied, regardless of their clientele, mission, educational level, or type of institution. The remainder of this section classifies and discusses these themes according to a contextual framework. Specifically, this framework classifies themes under the headings of school climate, administration, teachers, students, curriculum, institutional marketing, and support services. Although every effort has been made to identify concise, focused themes, it must be noted that obvious overlap exists between a number of these themes.

School Climate

Anderson (1982), in reviewing the work of many other researchers in the field, noted that "school climate includes the total environmental quality within a given school building" (p. 369). She also suggests that school climate is a broad construct that is composed of many variables. These variables, however, can be classified into four distinct dimensions, namely: ecology, milieu, social system, and culture. The ecology dimension examines the physical and material variables in a school. Variables in the milieu dimension are those relating to the background characteristics of people in a school. Social system variables are those reflecting the school's organizational structure. Finally, the culture dimension consists of variables regarding the norms, beliefs, and values of people within the school site. The school climate themes identified in this study are categorized according to these four dimensions.

Ecology Dimension

The researchers observed that exemplary institutions were noticeably concerned with the appearance of their building facilities and surrounding grounds. Selected examples of this concern were landscaped grounds, an absence of trash on hallway floors (researchers actually observed instances where staff and students picked up trash that had been left on the floor by others), and very little graffiti or vandalism. While there were exceptions to these observations, they were remarkably consistent from school to school. Researchers also noted that classrooms and laboratories were well-organized and arranged. The clutter that often accompanies many vocational programs was difficult to find. Even programs that generated considerable amounts of discarded materials or required large amounts of consumable materials (e.g., welding, autobody, and carpentry programs) were remarkably clean and orderly.

Observational and interview data provided evidence that resources for equipment, supplies, and other needed program materials were typically adequate to very good. Equipment was uniformly observed as being current and in some instances, "state-of-the-art". Classroom and laboratory facilities were also considered by staff and students as being adequate to very good. In responses to questions regarding resources, instructors consistently expressed opinions that resources were not a major concern of theirs. In fact, a number of staff members noted that if they had an identified equipment need, they and their administrators would come up with a workable plan to attain the needed items. Interview data with administrators and staff members also indicated that resources were made available to fund new innovations and creative ideas. When reviewing all of the data regarding resources in these exemplary institutions, it appears that these schools have been able to achieve sufficient levels of funding that enable their teachers to concentrate on other instructional concerns rather than complaining or worrying about inadequate equipment, supplies, and facilities. The level of funding necessary to reach this point might best be labeled the "critical threshold."

Milieu Dimension

Morale in these exemplary institutions was generally cited as being good by both students and teachers. High levels of morale were reflected in such statements as (in paraphrase) that, "This is the best school in which I've taught" or "I'm proud to work here". Similarly, students commented very favorably about the camaraderie and respect they had observed in their programs and throughout the school. A student in one school said, "It's like a big family here." Another student commented, "You just walk down the halls and other students and teachers (that you don't know) will say 'hi' to you...." While detailed more completely in the teacher section of this paper, a common theme that was reflective of positive student morale was the fact that teachers in these exemplary schools were viewed as truly caring about their students. Interviews with faculty members and students provided evidence that this caring attitude helped increase student self-esteem and confidence.

The researchers learned, in their interviews with instructors and administrators, that personnel turnover in these institutions was fairly low. Although this factor is consistent with the findings regarding positive teacher morale, the advantage noted by several administrators was that it enabled the institution to maintain some degree of stability. Stability of personnel allowed for greater consistency of relationships between administrators, instructors, and students, and for long-term consistency of program direction.

Social System Dimension

Good communication processes were observed in these exemplary institutions, with one or two exceptions. Faculty members noted that administrators were very knowledgeable regarding the types of activities being conducted in their programs. Consistent with good communication processes was an observed attitude of trust and respect between teachers, support staff, and administrators.

There was ample evidence that administrators made conscious efforts to insure that staff members were involved in decision-making processes in their schools. Many examples were cited by teachers of instances where they had substantial involvement in institutional and program decisions. Common examples of collaborative decision-making situations were in the areas of curriculum, new teacher hiring, and equipment and supply budgets. Teachers citing these examples sincerely felt that their input did was important and definitely had an impact on the final decisions that were made.

Teacher to teacher relationships in these schools were observed to be very collegial. Many instances were cited of situations where teachers from other departments or programs provided special assistance to their colleagues. The faculties in several schools even conducted regular, well-attended social events for themselves and their families. Teachers in all of these schools tended to view the relationships among their faculties as friendly, cooperative, and professional.

Culture Dimension

The research team observed that the exemplary institutions visited generally had an overt focus on developing and maintaining high quality standards. Many of the staff and students at these schools expressed a view that their school was "the best" of its kind in their region and they wanted to keep it that way. These institutions commonly referred to their individual "standards", which they believed met or exceeded the standards one would have for a leading educational institution. At several institutions, staff and students could clearly articulate a philosophy of the importance of quality in their work. One school expressed its commitment to quality through banners, stickers, and posters. At another institution, faculty members eagerly explained their institution's adoption and implementation of a school-wide quality control program.

School climate was enhanced by a strong sense of "mission" in the vocational centers, technical colleges, and community colleges. Administrators, teachers, and students in these institutions could readily articulate the purposes of their school or program. This mission was usually stated in such terms as "developing job skills" and "career preparation". Researchers did not, however, observe a unified sense of mission in the vocational programs in comprehensive high schools. Instructors in some of the high school programs, notably in programs undergoing transition, had difficulty in expressing the mission of their vocational education courses.

Administrators

Major findings regarding the administrative teams in the exemplary schools were reflected in the themes of leadership styles, high expectations of self and others, risk-taking, flexibility, and a strong sense of mission and vision. General observations of the research team were that the administrators in these exemplary institutions were very effective and successful. Indeed, the chief administrators in certain schools exhibited characteristics and behaviors that were indicative of exemplary leadership, particularly in the aspect of instilling a sense of mission and vision for their institutions.

Leadership Style

Two primary constructs related to leadership style are consideration and initiation of structure (Bass, 1990). The consideration construct reflects "the extent to which a leader exhibits concern for the welfare of the other members of the group" (p. 511). Stated differently, the consideration dimension reflects a leader's "people orientation." The construct of initiation of structure "shows the extent to which a leader initiates activity in the group, organizes it, and defines the way work is to be done" (p. 512). This dimension reflects a leader's "task orientation" or concern for getting the job done.

Administrators in this study considered themselves to be very people oriented. Interviews with staff members generally confirmed this belief. Evidence of this "people orientation" was noted in administrative efforts to involve staff in decisions that directly affected them. Overall, administrators in exemplary schools were concerned about the welfare and needs of their staffs. This concern was reflected in a decision-making process or style best classified as participatory rather than authoritarian. Several administrators, in reflecting on the decision-making processes in their schools, noted that they "had become less autocratic over the years." They specifically noted that when their faculty members were involved in the decision-making processes, thoughtful and considerate decisions were made. Staff members also showed a greater commitment to the decisions made. Consistent with these findings was the observation that administrators in these schools tended to delegate responsibility to other staff members. Faculty and support staff in exemplary schools commented that their administrators trusted them and let them do their jobs. Although a strong people orientation was observed in these administrators, interview data also

indicated that these individuals possessed high concern for getting tasks accomplished. Perhaps the most interesting finding regarding leadership styles was that administrators in these exemplary schools have developed the ability to insure that tasks are accomplished within an atmosphere of concern for staff involvement and participation.

High Expectations

Administrators noted that they had high expectations of themselves and their staff members. This concern for high expectations was verified by faculty and support staff. The researchers observed that a standard of excellence appears to exist in these schools. Although this standard exists, it is difficult for school personnel to define. Teachers, students, and administrators seem to know when this standard is attained, however, and meeting this standard is a thread that runs through the activities in exemplary schools. The relation of this standard to high expectations is that administrators fully expect themselves and their staff members to conduct their duties so as to reach the de facto standard of excellence in their schools.

Risk-taking

Numerous examples were cited of instances where administrators were willing to take risks and initiate new ventures or projects. There was a sense that these administrators focused on the advantages to be gained from these risks rather than on the disadvantages or hazards posed by them. One institution challenged the community to collaborate with them in developing a technology center to bring new businesses into the community. Another developed satellite campuses in other countries. While these are examples of ventures that entailed considerable financial risk, numerous other examples were given where administrators helped institute new programs, promoted cooperative efforts within their communities or other educational institutions, or implemented organizational change.

In addition to a willingness to take reasonable risks, these administrators demonstrated an ability to foresee trends or events that would have impacts on their schools. Consequently, they were able to take steps to maximize the positive effects of these events or to minimize the negative effects. One school undertook a major curriculum development project long before the state mandated system-wide change. Another institution was able to obtain expensive state-of-the-art equipment for one of their programs by anticipating a manufacturing company's plans. They knew that this company was looking for a possible training site in which it could install its equipment. Several years before the company made its final decision, this school had built facilities which would accommodate this specialized equipment and, as a result of this foresight, was successful in receiving the equipment donation. Still another institution realized the potential benefits of computer technology and implemented a computerized registration and fee payment system which greatly reduced the time students spent waiting in line. Many comparable institutions still do not have such systems.

Flexibility

Flexibility was another trait that faculty members and support staff noted regarding these administrators. They were not locked into traditional or familiar ways of doing things. They were willing to consider new ideas and proposals. More importantly, they were willing to support these creative ideas and proposals, both financially and with personal encouragement.

Vision and Sense of Mission

Perhaps one of the most interesting findings regarding administrators in exemplary schools was their ability to instill a sense of vision and mission within their faculties, support staffs, and students. Not only did administrators clearly articulate their goals and mission for their institutions, but their staff members were able to do so as well. It was observed that people in these schools knew why they were there and what they were supposed to do. Staff members in several schools commented on the importance of their administrators in establishing this sense of mission. A staff member in one school said, "The reason this school is so successful is because of the vision of (the administrator)." "Having vision" was also cited by several others when describing reasons their administrators were so effective.

Teacher Attributes

Several of the most notable teacher characteristics are presented in this section. Specific teachers attributes discussed are a caring attitude, acceptance of student diversity, creation of positive classroom climate, and high expectations for themselves and their students.

Among the most apparent attributes of vocational teachers in exemplary programs was an attitude of caring. Teachers exhibited genuine concern for their students as individuals and students detected this concern. As one student stated, "They care here.... You can tell by their actions...if you've got a problem, they'll pull you out of class and talk to you and they'll do everything they can to help you. Another said, "I got a thank you note (from my instructor) in the school mail today telling me 'thank you.' That's something I've never had before from any teacher. That helps a lot. Just a pat on the back. Acknowledging what you do."

The teachers offered support beyond the normal expectations of any typical teacher-student relationship. Most were willing to spend time with students or spend time performing duties not usually considered to be part of a teacher's responsibilities. In reference to this teacher characteristic, one student said, "I found that in my class, the teacher works with the students if they have problems with things or they're having problems at home or something, he'll take them in his office and talk to them, try to help them work things out.... He'll even give them his home phone number if they ever need help or somebody to talk to.... And in a sense, my teacher has become a friend for me because we've done some things together and we can talk and it's worked out great...."

Teachers in exemplary programs accepted student diversity. They recognized that each student has different abilities, wants and needs. These teachers allowed students to be unique. They used these differences to create learning environments suitable to the individual student and to the collective class. For example, one student noted this teacher attribute by stating, "He (the instructor) knows where we're coming from. He doesn't do it from his standpoint. (Instead, he understands) everybody else's standpoint, where everybody is. He makes it where we are and how we're going to move into their positions...."

Teachers created a positive climate in their classes. They were demanding, having high expectations of students, yet they were friendly and encouraging. The environment created by these teachers was one of challenge for students to better themselves. Students were accepting of this and felt comfortable in their classes. One student's response regarding positive climate and high expectations was, "(The instructors) want you to work to your potential. But if you're having trouble with something, they don't say, 'You've got to know this by tomorrow.' Instead, they'll help you with it. If they see that you're trying to work up to your potential, that's fine. But if you're just sitting there in class not doing anything, just barely doing anything, just to pass, that's not what they want. They want you to work to your potential." Another stated, "Everybody gets along in our class. ...we never laugh at anyone, we laugh with them When you can take someone laughing at something you did and laugh with them back again, you know you're getting along real well. The atmosphere in the classroom is created by the instructor...."

Additionally, the teachers in the study were characterized by their students as being patient and willing to create opportunities for students to discuss their needs. They practiced esteem building and student participation in their educational processes. They were good communicators. Research observations concluded that these teachers maintained a professional appearance and expected the same of their students.

Student Attributes

A strong sense of pride among the students was noted at each of the institutions visited by the researchers. During interviews with individual students and with groups of students, and during observations of students in educational activities, they expressed a great feeling of pride in themselves and in their institutions. One post-secondary student in a robotics program provided a very typical comment about his institution, "This is just the best place I've run across as far as education goes. You can't beat it."

Students had positive feelings about being involved in their programs. They maintained professional standards among themselves, including appropriate behavior and dress. Many students indicated that they believed that entry into their programs was by a selective process. One student noted that in his program, "...there are a lot of stringent guidelines (for entry), (the students are) more dedicated to what they are doing.... They are weeded out

from the beginning. They (low ability students) don't even get into the program."

Follow-up interviews with institutional administrators indicated that such student selection was not widely practiced. However, the perception of selection was not highly discouraged and may even be perpetuated as a part of an underlying student esteem-building activity. Many programs administered written tests, individual career counseling sessions, and departmental interviews prior to admission to the program which seems to contribute to the selectivity perception.

It is the observation of the researchers that such an activity results in a self-fulfilling prophecy, that while anyone can be admitted to a program, some students self-select out prior to beginning and the students who do enter the program believe they are superior and begin to function accordingly. The result is a set of high expectations that each student places on him\herself and on the program. These high expectations are readily articulated by students in interviews and by observing their education-related activities. With students placing high expectations on themselves, instructors experience little difficulty in having them accept the perception that their programs are "tough" but that rigor is a precursor to high quality.

Vocational Student Organizations

Active vocational student organizations were found to exist in the majority of the institutions studied, regardless of the level or age of the students involved. However, the level commitment to student organizations expressed by individual administrators and faculty members varied widely. While some individuals expressed the opinion that such activities were extra-curricular to the education of students, and as such were of only incidental importance to the mission of the institution, other individuals believed that student involvement in such organizations was an important component of the total educational program of each student. It is interesting to note that in nearly every institution there were individual faculty or staff members who were personally committed to providing at least one overall vocational student organization, even if individual vocational programs did not offer one. Thus, students were afforded the opportunity to participate.

Curriculum

At each of the institutions studied, the researchers sought to determine the nature or content of the curriculum as well as the underlying philosophies which guide the curriculum. An analysis of the data collected regarding curricular concerns provides strong evidence of three important sub-themes of curriculum in institutions of excellence. The technical content of each of the program offerings is strongly influenced by the use of industry\community-based advisory committees, but that content is tempered by the teaching methodology concerns of instructors who work in close cooperation with these committees. Further, individual faculty members have a strong sense of ownership in their curricula. It was also observed that there is much more

being taught to students than the technical content that teachers are able to articulate.

Content of Programs

Nearly all of the institutions offered some form of competency-based scheme for organizing the technical content of instruction. This content is developed through the use of advisory committees, working closely with individual instructors, to identify the current technical content expectations of workers in the industry. The advisory committee process appears to be a continual activity to insure that each program is current with industry standards. The instructors work with their respective advisory committees throughout the advisory process to insure the practicality of teaching particular skills within the context of the program and to assist in determining appropriate teaching procedures for each of the technical skills. When new skills are identified which are not possessed by the instructor, the advisory committee assists the instructor in in-service activities to gain the necessary skills. Nearly all of the institutions visited had very adequate programs and policies for providing instructors with leaves and financial support to participate in such activities. When new skills are identified for which necessary equipment is not available within a program, the advisory committee assists with obtaining the equipment.

At several of the institutions visited, the researchers met with advisory committee members from a sampling of vocational programs. In each case the members were very enthusiastic in their support of their respective programs. They also felt that they were very knowledgeable of the program, the graduates of the program, and the instructional staff. As one member articulated, this may be a result of their close-working association with the program.

Faculty Ownership

In each of the institutions under study there existed a strong sense of ownership among the faculty for the curriculum offered in their respective programs. Faculty members took great pride in their efforts at developing and maintaining course materials. Several of the institutions offered financial incentives to instructors for continual updating of course materials.

A Dual Curriculum

When asked to explain their philosophies of curriculum, nearly all instructors articulated the importance of providing the most current technical skills needed by the industry. They explained the importance of task analysis in the planning model and the use of the advisory committee as representing the industry. Nearly every instructor explained the importance of "meeting industry needs" and did so in terms of providing students with specific technical skills.

Observation of many classes, student and teacher interaction, and interviews with students provide a philosophy of curriculum in practice by

instructors which is quite different from that being articulated. In nearly each instance, instructors did an adequate job of providing technical skills training. However, the level and efficiency of that training was essentially what one would expect to find in any well organized vocational education program. Perhaps of more importance was the finding that programs in these institutions appear to provide for additional student skills in the affective and personal development areas. It may be the pervasiveness of these affective and personal development skills across the entire institution that make these schools and their programs quite unique in vocational education. Through observations of their programs, their students and their instructors, these institutions appear to provide a more holistic education for their students. In practice, they are concerned with the development of the "whole person" rather than just providing technical skills. Supporting evidence for this observation is evidenced elsewhere in this paper such as in the teacher and student sections and the climate section.

These observations are noteworthy in light of the philosophies which underlie curriculum development. The philosophies driving the curricula of these programs seem to be competing conceptions of curriculum development. A number of conceptual discussions to describe the philosophies which drive the nature of the vocational education enterprise exist; two will be explained here. McNeil (1986) suggests four alternative conceptions or philosophies by which to develop educational programs:

- The "humanistic curriculum" is committed to meeting the learner's needs for self-actualization, achievement, individualism, and relevance of their education to daily living. This is often associated with the "holistic" approach to education.
- The "social reconstructionist curriculum" is used as a vehicle to influence social change. Learning opportunities stress that individuals examine their beliefs and values and cooperate toward social change.
- The "technological curriculum" operates on the principle of mastery or competency-based learning. Task analyses of work roles provide an arrangement of measurable performance objectives. This approach is most closely associated with the Prosser and Snedden model of vocational education which operates under a "social efficiency" paradigm. (See Wirth, 1974 & 1977.)
- The "academic curriculum" focuses on developing rational minds with skills in the scientific process. It is most closely associated with an emphasis on common core studies called "basics."

Swanson (1980) outlined a second conceptual model of philosophies which guide curriculum. He noted that there are three historically-based cultural "streams" which influence American mainstream and, thus, guide curriculum.

- The "philosophical stream" originated with the ancient Greek culture and described the ultimate end of education as the "pursuit of truth." "The pursuit was the end and any discovery to truth was regarded as transitory, temporary, or instrumental and thus only means to illuminate a further search."
- The "theistic stream" had its origin in the Judeo-Christian tradition and became a strong influence beginning in the 16th century when the concept of "work" began to acquire some intrinsic merit alone, being

regarded as having some "some soul-redeeming features" of its own. From this stream came the "Protestant work ethic."

- The "socio-economic stream" originated mainly in England and gained its impetus from the popular economic philosophy of Adam Smith (The Wealth of Nations, 1776[1921, 6th ed.]). It provides justification for the wide differences in social and economic conditions which existed between individuals in society (i.e. workers and peasants at one end of the scale with industry leaders, professionals and politicians at the other end). It justifies these differences as "natural law." The social efficiency paradigm of Snedden and Prosser seems closely aligned with this philosophic stream.

Upon observation of the institutions under study, a sort of dual philosophy seems to exist in the minds of the students, faculty and administrators. Each of these individuals seems able to articulate (with varying degrees of success) a philosophy of curriculum which is built upon both the technological curriculum, as conceptualized by McNeil, and the socio-economic stream of Swanson. As previously noted, faculty members were eager to explain the detail with which their courses are organized around task analyses and how their programs provide individuals with the necessary technical skills to fit into an important work role needed in society. Indeed, the adoption of the Snedden/Prosser social efficiency paradigm by vocational education is well documented in the literature (See Leutkemeyer, 1987; Wirth 1974 & 1977.) and served as a foundation for the original federal vocational education legislation. This model accepts the "natural law" of individuals fitting into social classes and promotes the concept that education should train them to fulfill work roles necessary to society.

However, when students are asked to describe why they believe their institutions or programs are among the best educational programs, the overwhelming first responses relate to factors not readily articulated by faculty or administrators. These responses relate to the humanistic and holistic features of their programs. Students seem to believe that the processes of their educational endeavors are as important as the technical content of their programs. They especially noted the caring attitudes of their teachers and classmates, and how these attitudes are related to building and enhancing their self-esteem. Instructors and students alike expressed concerns for insuring the development of values and the individual's worth to society.

This may be among the most refreshing of all the findings of this study. The thing that separates the very best vocational education institutions from the good ones may be that the very best programs reach beyond their stated curricular outcomes and educate holistic individuals. They are much more interested in how people learn than in what they know. There seem to be no artificial boundaries between theory and practice.

Support Services

Each of the secondary centers and post-secondary institutions visited had well developed support service programs. (The exceptions to this

observation include the secondary programs located within comprehensive high schools where, it is believed, support services are provided for the larger student body.) The support services include general education programs or "basics skills centers," career counseling, and placement programs for students, and clerical support for instructors.

Each institution operated some form of general education program to assist students in sharpening necessary skills in academic basics such as reading, writing, and mathematics skills. Many of these programs provided individualized instruction and one-to-one student-faculty assistance. In nearly every instance, students who participated in these programs, as well as those who did not participate, spoke very highly of the program and believed it to be a strength of the institution. Faculty members in technical areas indicated their strong support for these academic skills programs by noting that they were necessary and that they were not considered undue competition for institutional resources.

With the exception of the vocational programs in the comprehensive high schools, each institution had extensive vocational placement and career counseling components. Students were very positive in their assessments of these activities, believing that the institution did a good job in assisting each student in determining their individual abilities and talents and then finding suitable employment upon completion. The importance of these programs to the institution is previously noted in this paper in the curriculum discussion relative to establishing a perception of quality within the institution.

Institutional Marketing

Nearly all of the institutions did a good job of marketing their programs to the related industries and their geographic service areas. Marketing of programs to related industries was done by establishing support for each program through the use of advisory committees and by providing support and encouragement for faculty members to actively participate in industry-based activities. There was a general expectation of faculty members to physically "get out of the building" and into the businesses.

These institutions were actively involved in their communities, were sensitive to community needs and provided service activities to their communities. Many of them maintained full-time institutional marketing personnel to assess community needs and interests and determine the institution's role in filling appropriate needs. It should be noted that all of the institutions considered themselves as having good support within their communities. Further, it was observed that a majority of the institutions served economically stable communities. Several administrators and faculty noted that their local economic bases were generally stable.

CONCLUSIONS

A number of general themes were consistent across all of the institutions studied, regardless of their clientele or mission. Several

school climate factors identified were a conspicuous focus on quality, an orderly physical environment, an attitude of pride on the part of staff and students, and positive relationships between staff and students. Funding generally seemed to be above a "critical threshold" so that it was not a staff worry.

Administrative styles tended to be participatory rather than authoritarian. These administrators also appeared to practice leadership by vision rather than by closely managing people's activities and were generally proactive rather than reactive. In addition to having high expectations of themselves, they also had high expectations of their staff members. Administrators encouraged the development of new ideas by their staffs. Instructors noted a sense of autonomy in their instructional activities. They tended to be satisfied with their jobs, were competent and knowledgeable, and had expectations of professional behavior. They genuinely cared about students and had high expectations of their students as well as themselves. They cooperated with other staff members and sometimes engaged in friendly competition with each other. "Flexible" was a term that characterized teachers and administrators in exemplary institutions.

Student organizations were active in each institution. Students expressed pride in themselves, in their programs, and in their institutions. They also had high expectations of themselves and of their programs. Professional behavior and dress standards were characteristics exhibited by many students. Students generally had productive and effective relationships with their instructors.

Teachers were actively involved in curriculum development and in initiatives for curriculum change. Students and instructors perceived their curriculums as being relevant and up-to-date. Advisory committees were very active and committed to program goals. Ample evidence was provided that advisory committees advised faculty, not just administrators. These themes are especially noteworthy considering the wide variations of curriculum approaches that existed between the institutions studied. A type of dual curriculum was found in which students were provided a more holistic education in addition to technical skills development.

This study provided a rare look into exemplary vocational education institutions. These institutions are models of the practices, beliefs, and values that many other schools strive for but can't quite attain. Those schools that have not yet reached exemplary status can learn much from the institutions in this study. Perhaps more importantly, the findings from this study can provide a framework for stimulating dialogue in and among those vocational education institutions wishing to achieve excellence. Excellence can indeed be attained; the schools cited in this study provide evidence and examples of how it can be done.

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